Van Zandt — Late? Great?

by Wanda Adams —

The Late, Great Townes Van Zandt (Famous Frame)

Back when he was a relative newcomer to the Austin music scene, Townes Van Zandt released his first album. Now, four albums later, he is still producing basically the same tunes — only the lyrics and titles have changed. His constant use of the same chord progression is boring and downright grating after awhile.

But Townes Van Zandt is, at least, a down-to-earth country gent who can deliver some good songs on The Late Great, "Frassin," sound just like a great deal of his previous work. That is what makes his latest effort, Ain't No Woman (Like the One I've Got) (recently recorded by Doc Watson), which is potentially a nice song except for the fact that it resembles half of both of the songs included on his Townes Van Zandt (Poppy) album released three years ago.

Townes title to be innovative since what on this album with a slowed down, tolling organ and perhaps a bit of William composition, "Honky Tonk," Townes sound number is too slow — he sounds like he could do a shoot of Quito or Vitamin B or something.

For the most part, The Late, Great Townes Van Zandt is flat. Sometimes it is hard to remember it. It fails to demonstrate the fact that Townes is capable of playing very fine blues guitar, which he proved several weeks ago during a Jordan Hall concert, and as he is currently doing (through Sunday) at the Possum Coffeehouse.

The concert was interesting enough, although for whatever reason (lack of personnel?) too many people in the audience. Townes was initially quite matter-of-fact, enhanced by the fact that he was alone and without backing musicians. His falsetto voice and pleasant, long drawn-out songs were dominated hopefully by "If I Needed You," "Fra-ssin," and "I'll Be Here in the Morning."

The other exception, "Mr. Mud, and Mr. Gold," is a gambling song filled with witty comments and word constructions and analogies. Townes used both songs to demonstrate his flattop picking ability, which, for the most part, is quite different on Great Townes Van Zandt. It was downhill all the way from those two songs, though. Townes started slipping into his standard chord progression again. Generally, it is easy to identify different songs by the introduction. Not so with Townes Van Zandt. Unfortunately, all the introductions sounded about the same after awhile.

With very few exceptions, the album is a downer. The late great Townes Van Zandt is a downer. He is still capable of playing very fine blues guitar, which he proved several weeks ago during a Jordan Hall concert, and as he is currently doing (through Sunday) at the Possum Coffeehouse.

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